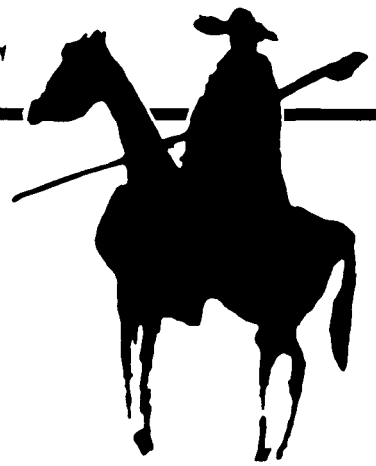


# TILTING AT WINDMILLS

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When R.W. Apple Jr., the London correspondent of *The New York Times*, returned to this country for a visit a year ago, he was impressed by the “new stirrings of patriotism” he found as he traveled across the land. Those words became the title of a cover article he wrote for *The New York Times Magazine* last December. The flag-waving at the Olympics and at the Democratic and Republican conventions offered further evidence to support Apple’s thesis.

My question is what does this new patriotism mean? Are people willing to translate their flag-waving into acts of sacrifice for the common good? Are the rich willing to perform their share of military service or are they going to continue to bribe

the poor to do it for them? Are we willing to give up the tax breaks that benefit us or do we want the other fellow to do the sacrificing?

I believe the future belongs to leaders who will ask these questions. Ironically, a number of commentators are now counseling the Democratic party to rebuild itself by catering to the special interests of the middle class. This is terrible advice. The party is in decline because of its sell-out to various groups. It should not seek salvation by adding one more to the list. . . .

What is wrong with the Democratic party is concisely explained by *The Washington Post’s* Mike Causey in an article about the party

platform: “The federal employee portion of the Democratic document was written in large part by representatives of federal and postal worker unions.” . . .

When President Reagan said the CIA’s Nicaragua manual, that handy assassination guide, was being investigated, who do you think was assigned to do the investigating? It was the agency’s deputy inspector general. It’s hard to imagine a better choice. After all, his boss, the inspector general, had been the head of the covert operations division when the manual was written and distributed. . . .

When Ronald Reagan vetoed a bill authorizing higher spending for public broadcasting, Bruce Christensen, the president of the Public Broadcasting

Service, charged, according to a report in *The Washington Post*, that "the veto discriminates against the poor, children, and the elderly." I often imagine the poor huddled around their sets watching "Wall Street Week"...

The General Accounting Office is charged with the responsibility of appraising the efficiency of other government agencies. Does this explain why it uses United Parcel Service?...

Our Least Astounding Headline of the Year Award goes to *The New York Times* for this one, which stretched across three columns on October 28: "Study Says Income in Inner Cities Trails Suburbs"...

Under a Transit Authority regulation, New York City's subway cars that experience three switch-box failures in two months are supposed to be taken out of service. Car 9000 had nine such failures. It was not taken out of service. On October 12 it burst into flames at the Borough Hall station in Brooklyn. The fire burned out of control until the floor of the car melted. If the fire had occurred a few minutes earlier while the train was in a tunnel under the East River, "There could have been a major tragedy," according to a report by Suzanne Daley of *The New York Times*. Why did this happen? One reason is that the Transit Authority is riddled with I'm-all-right-Jack employees who, if they are not incompetent, simply don't care. When are liberals

in New York and elsewhere going to rise up against the outrages inflicted upon them by public employees like these? The people hurt by bad service and unsafe cars are those who liberals have traditionally defended...

The Republican party paid Gerald Ford \$200,000 to go around the country campaigning for various Republican candidates this year. Since Ford is a rich man, why does he ask to be paid? Doesn't he believe in his party and its candidates enough to volunteer his services?...

Donald Couture was convicted of murder by a Connecticut jury. The evidence showed that during a robbery he had killed three men by shooting them in the back. The state supreme court said that the evidence against Couture was "overwhelming." Yet it overturned his conviction. Why? Because during the trial the prosecutor had called Couture "a rat," "a murderous fiend," and "a merciless killer."

Here is another case where questionable behavior by a law-enforcement official—in this case very mildly questionable behavior—is used by a court to revoke conviction of a clearly guilty criminal. When guilt is clear, why don't we rebuke or penalize the offending official but keep the criminal in jail where he belongs?

The presidential candidate grabs the microphone and

says, "Don't cut me off, I'm paying for this broadcast." One of Ronald Reagan's great moments, right? Inspired, quick thinking. Who says he's just a cardboard movie actor who recites words written by others? Well, you won't believe it, but even that was in a movie! It was a 1948 film called *State of the Union*. The candidate was played by Spencer Tracy. The words were written by Howard Lindsay and Russell Crouse. They were exactly as quoted above...

After we had spent a billion or so refurbishing the battleship *New Jersey* you would have thought it could shoot straight. But, alas, as we found out in Lebanon, it could not. The ship might have been like new but the Navy had forgotten the ammunition. So the *New Jersey* was firing shells that were all more than 30 years old...

The headline in *The Washington Post* read, "CPAC Says to Throw Out Old Cribs, Hand-Me-Down Nursery Equipment Called Dangerous." Did the story run on the front page? Yes. On the front page of the Business section, that is—just where the average parent would be sure to see it because of his keen interest in the adjoining stories—"Holiday Inn, Comsat Plan Satellite Deal" and "Regan Outlines Study On Banking Reform."

This is the second time recently that I've seen a consumer safety story placed in the *Post's* Business section. One wonders how the editors go about making these inspired decisions...

A friend writes with this story:

On Saturday, my wife and I were sitting against the railing of the south fence at the White House waiting to take the fall tour of the gardens and grounds. Sitting next to us were two male juniors from Haverford College, outside Philadelphia.

They were here in Washington to solicit congressional internships for next summer, ostensibly a fine goal for a summer's work. Get a firsthand look at a democratic government and pick up the slack on unfinished business.

But the real reason, I learned, was not so altruistic. "All I've heard is internships are great," said the tall one with the Cartier tank watch. "Congress is on vacation for a good part of the summer, and interns get to open all the mail from the lobbyists. You make the replies and get

first cracks at the great cocktail parties—you get to go to all of them."

"Oh yeah?" said the other, suddenly very interested. He had been complaining that he thought the trip was a waste of time.

"That's where you make the connections for the job afterwards. That's how my brother got his and look at him now, he's cruising," replied Cartier. . . .

Now that the train gets you from midtown Washington to midtown Manhattan in three hours, why do so many businessmen still make the trip by air—even though the flight, transportation to and from airports, and frequent takeoff and landing delays usually consume more than three hours? The answer must be that flying reeks of important men on urgent missions while the train suggests the unhurried life of people who are not really

busy. . . .

Twenty percent of the District of Columbia's public school students are absent each day. What solution do the administrators propose? Hire "attendance counselors."

Why do people marry? I don't know why they do these days, but for the women of my generation, it often seemed that they married to realize the unfulfilled ambitions of their parents. Thus if Mom and Dad were self-made millionaires, their devoted daughter would find a husband who would give her family the social standing money had not bought. My favorite example of the marriage that helped Daddy is Julie Nixon's. It is well-documented that Dwight Eisenhower's regard for Nixon was not excessive during his presidency or in the years immediately following it. At that time Ike leaned toward the Scranton-Lodge wing of the Republican party and seemed to share Herblock's view of Nixon as a faintly sinister fellow with too much five o'clock shadow.

Julie's widely publicized romance with David Eisenhower, the apple of his grandfather's eye, made Ike's 1968 endorsement of Nixon seem heartfelt instead of pro forma. For that year, at least, it removed the five o'clock shadow.

The 1968 election fascinates me, because I think it was decided by two factors that were totally unrecognized at the time. One was Julie

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This is to thank those of you who've given us assistance—and to urge even more of you to join in. We really do need your help. If you send us a story idea, a Tidbit, an Outrage, or a Memo, you can count on us to protect your identity if you do not want it disclosed.

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and David's clean-up of Dad's act. The other, which has since become known, at least to a few people, was Anna Chennault's successful efforts to get Thieu to torpedo the Paris peace talks, which arrested the growing momentum toward Humphrey the weekend before the election. . . .

How many cowards are there in the House of Representatives? Exactly 355. That's how many members voted against permitting doctors to prescribe heroin to relieve the otherwise unbearable pain of terminally ill cancer patients. There is no reason for such a vote other than that an opponent might use it against you. . . .

What happens to organizations once they've accomplished their original purpose? I need hardly ask readers of this magazine, who of course know that the organization doesn't fold, it finds a new purpose. The latest example, called to my attention by Phillip Weiss, is the Infant Formula Action Coalition. It won its battle against Nestle's marketing of a baby formula in the third world that caused severe health problems for infants. "You'd think the group would hold a party and disband," writes Weiss. "But INFAC has dedicated itself to a whole new cause: the peace movement. The group will focus on corporate responsibility for the arms race." A laudable cause, yet one can't help suspecting that a motivating factor in many of these cases, if not this one, is an existing list of contributors, which is hard to abandon when there are officials of the group who

want to preserve the salaries to which they have become accustomed. . . .

Why is it that so many of us in the middle and upper classes can become so enraged at the slightest abuse of the public treasury by a welfare mother, yet not be embarrassed at all by the Social Security payments our own mothers receive that they don't need? In fact most of our mothers have long since used up their contribution to Social Security plus interest and are now living off other taxpayers just as much as the welfare mother is, with a lot less moral right than she usually has.

It is also true that welfare mothers do not get the tax-subsidized vacations that the middle and upper classes are becoming accustomed to view as their right. These are the vacations associated with conferences and conventions that often involve tax deductions larger than the amount many welfare mothers receive. . . .

Articles that bring together fact, feeling, and analysis will, we predict elsewhere in this issue (see page 12), be the wave of the future in journalism. But there are still times when we want just the facts and not a lot of color and commentary. One of them was election night. It used to be that, on these occasions, the networks would run down the totals in the House, Senate, and gubernatorial races every half hour. This year these races came perilously close to being ignored as the networks interviewed one pundit after another on the meaning of it all. The irony was that except for the presidential returns

they hadn't told us what "it all" was. This shortage of information was especially severe on the House and gubernatorial races. You may have noticed that Dan Rather kept saying, "What's really important is what's happening with those House seats." Then he would turn to another commentator who would repeat the observation but not give us the actual returns. . . .

**T**he FBI reports that serious crime is decreasing, falling by 3.3 percent in 1982 and 6.7 percent in 1983. Reagan was quick to take credit for this development. I suspect the major factor has been the decline in the population of males aged 18 to 25, the group that has the greatest tendency to get into trouble. But there has also been a change in attitude. People are less tolerant of crime, less willing to take the criminal's side against society's. Reagan has been part of that movement. So have we.

While neoliberalism as a movement of people who so identify themselves is tiny indeed, many of the ideas associated with it have flourished in recent years. Attitudes toward crime—when I started this magazine I could not find one liberal journalist who would take a tough stand—are but one example. National defense is another. The James Fallows/Gary Hart approach is now dominant among thoughtful Democrats. Respect for the entrepreneur has grown enormously since the early days of *The Washington Monthly*, when it

was another subject I couldn't get liberal journalists to write about. Similarly, when we started our "Culture of Bureaucracy" section in 1969, most people thought we must be writing about Mozart at Constitution Hall. Now the anthropological view of organizations we were trying to encourage has become common and, with it, much greater insight into the problems of our corporate and government bureaucracies. Finally the neoliberal indictment of Fritz Mondale as the candidate of the liberal special interests became the accepted view of what was wrong with him. So while your mother may never have heard of us, she's probably saying some of the very same things we are. . . .

**T**he secret of success in a presidential debate seems to be avoiding a lie so obvious that even the television commentators will recognize it quickly enough to include it in their post-debate analyses. If the truth takes research, it's going to be buried in the back columns of the newspapers and magazines.

Two examples: First, Reagan's statement that there were only a dozen copies of the CIA's Nicaragua assassination manual. The fact is there were 2,000. Second, there was the president's assertion that the alternative to Marcos in the Philippines "is a large communist movement." The truth is that the great majority of the Marcos opposition is noncommunist. . . .

I am grateful to James Fallows and Nicholas Lemann for helping Timothy Noah and Jonathan Rowe put out the November edition of *The Monthly* while I was on vacation. The issue is a gem. The only flaw I can find is an unanswered letter-to-the-editor from Eugene Balof that says the air strikes against the *Bismarck* in 1941 were "ineffective." It is true that surface ships sank the *Bismarck*. But they did so only after air attacks had left it circling helplessly, unable to return to safe harbor. It was "seaborne aircraft," writes Winston Churchill, "who struck the decisive blows." . . .

In Florida, the doctors and the trial lawyers, two groups that richly deserve each other, are locked in combat over a proposed state constitutional amendment that would limit recovery in personal injury cases to \$100,000. This should be a battle worth watching, since both sides have firmly established their ability to rise above ordinary moral standards in their pursuit of the two-Mercedes garage. . . .

My fears that liberated women imitate the worst absurdities of the male are sadly reinforced by this recent headline for *The New York Times*: "Lung Cancer Rising as Killer of Women, U.S. Agency Says." . . .

**A** thought about neoliberalism that's been lurking in my mind for years has finally surfaced: It is this: If one great strain in the American character is idealism, the other is, "I

don't want to be a sucker." This is why we support a draft. You think you should do your part but you're damned if you want to be the only one on your block who is out in that foxhole while the rest of the guys are back home getting laid and driving around in cars. Under the draft you serve and so does that jerk across the street. In fact, now that you're serving together, you may find that he's not a jerk at all.

Paul Tsongas attained neoliberal sainthood when he recognized the sucker problem at the time of the Chrysler bailout. He understood the auto workers' fear that management would profit from labor sacrifice and said we'll give you stock so that if your sacrifice makes money you get some of it. You won't be a sucker.

Tsongas, despite his illness, continues to function in ways that I must say I admire very much.

By quietly working as an intermediary between the Salvadoran army and its guerrilla opponents, he helped create, according to *The Washington Post's* Robert McCartney, "a climate that allowed President Jose Napoleon Duarte to offer the peace initiative that led to the face-to-face meeting between Duarte and guerrilla leaders."

He has also been trying to help restore American competitiveness by lowering the cost of capital, which is now three times as much for our firms as it is for their Japanese competitors. One of his suggestions: "Our current tax policy discourages savings by taxing individuals on the interest they earn and giving them deductions on the



interest they pay. We could eliminate the tax deduction for interest paid on consumer debt and use the increased tax revenue to reduce the tax rate on interest earned."

On another front, Tsongas is fighting the ideology lectures being given Peace Corps volunteers by the Reagan administration.

This may seem an arcane matter, but those of us who have been associated with the Peace Corps know that it repeats a serious error it made in its early years. Half of the first volunteers' training consisted of courses in American studies, world affairs, and communism. We were training junior diplomats. But when our volunteers reached the villages of the third world, they found no one wanted to talk about these things. What they wanted was a volunteer who had the skill to help them, who could speak their language, and understand their customs. If he was that kind of volunteer—and that's what we quickly learned he should be trained to be—he could make far more friends for himself and his country than he would by propagandizing....

That there just might be something wrong with the Internal Revenue Code is suggested by the fact that for the years 1981-83, the St. Regis Corporation got \$121 million in tax refunds while it was making \$124 million in profits....

What I like about lotteries is that, like the wealth success confers on professional athletes and

entertainers, they break the established pattern of who can be rich and bring badly needed new blood into our upper classes. What I don't like about them is captured in a television commercial sponsored by the Washington, D.C., lottery in which a woman looks into the camera and cajolingly confides, "The more you play, the higher the jackpot goes!"...

Walter Shapiro's article on the impossibility of living a modest, middle-class life in modern Manhattan (see page 44) reminds me how easy that life was to lead when I arrived there in January 1946 to enter Columbia. The

subway and the bus cost 5 cents, as did a glass of beer.

That summer they rose to 10 cents, amidst anguished complaints about runaway inflation. The fourth beer was still "bounced"—meaning it was free—at the Irish bars I frequented along Amsterdam Avenue. Balcony tickets to concerts, the theater, the ballet, the opera, could be had for \$1.20 or \$1.80. Dinner was obtainable at good, if modest, Italian and French restaurants like Barbetta's and the Brittany for \$2 or \$3. With dedicated hunting—this usually meant

(continued on page 60)

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# What David Learn from

by Timothy Noah

(and V.)

One of the more encouraging developments in journalism during the 1960s and 1970s was a movement away from the dry and one-dimensional newspaper story towards a variety of forms that conveyed to the readers more of the depth and texture of people and events. A major part of this movement was the transformation of what had been known as the "society section" or the "women's pages" into something at once less definable but potentially more significant—not just for those pages themselves, but for the way newspapers portray the "news" in general.

The names of these new sections—"Style," "Tempo," "View," "Living," "The Way We Live"—suggested that the editors were vaguely aware they were missing something in their news and feature stories, and the women's pages were the forums in which they were going to capture it. The staples of these women's pages—topics like home furnishings, cooking, weddings, and engagements, and the doings of the rich and powerful—continued to receive attention in the new sections. But there appeared as well a new kind of feature story that was rich in observation and human detail, and that at the same time conveyed some sense of the significance (or lack of same) of the individual or event in question.

The women's page was born sometime in 1890s and died sometime in the 1970s, at least in the major metropolitan dailies. Its rise coincided with that of the department stores, whose advertising increased the need for features aimed at women, especially those related to home improvement. (To this day, style sections, which I will call them for want of a better term, remain heavily com-

mitted to the agenda of their advertisers. Many newspapers have gone so far as to create whole sections to suit their needs—*The New York Times's* "Home" section and its periodic travel and fashion supplements are examples.) A certain degree of standardization came about after 1900 with the rise of feature syndicates, which provided columns on such subjects as cooking, clothing, and advice to the lovelorn. These articles mingled with stories of a more local bent—marriages, parties, and the ubiquitous profiles of spouses of prominent men, to name a few perennials.

A 1938 journalism textbook by Curtis D. MacDougall of Northwestern University captured the tone of the society page by describing the essential elements of a party story: names of participants, decorations ("color scheme, its significance and how it was carried out"), refreshments ("always learn who poured and who served"), and, of course, the occasion. Unflattering details of the story were simply left out, and any adjectives used were uniformly favorable.

In the era of the society page, recalls Charlotte Curtis of *The New York Times*, "all weddings were beautiful, all parties were perfect" in the eyes of their chroniclers. Readers with the wit to read between the lines might discern suggestive insights on what, in editors' eyes, comprised the "real" news. Party reporter Betty Beale recalls how the Eisenhowers rarely invited the Nixons to White House functions, signaling to hawk-eyed readers what the pundits didn't realize until later—that Eisenhower was ambivalent about keeping Nixon on the ticket in 1956. Society reporters like Beale failed, however, to make such connections for their readers. The major obstacle

*Timothy Noah is an editor of The Washington Monthly. Research assistance for this article was provided by Jim Lynn.*